

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The House of Representatives on Tuesday passed the Southern Sea Otter Recovery and Research Act, introduced by Congressman Sam Farr (D-Carmel) earlier this year. The bill, which authorizes funding for recovery and research efforts to support the Southern sea otter, passed by a vote of 316-107.

"The Southern sea otters are a keystone species," Rep. Farr said during Monday's debate on the House floor. "That means if they break the chain, the whole ecological system falls apart."

The legislation ( [H.R. 556](#) ) would require the Department of Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service to carry out a recovery program to include protection of existing populations; reduction of human activities that limit population growth; monitoring and analysis of otter populations; and public outreach about human effects on otters.

"Helping the recovery of the Southern sea otter has the added benefit of increasing Central Coast tourism revenue," Rep. Farr said. "Fans of the otter contributed hundreds of thousands of tourism dollars every year to our communities, a big factor in contributing to the recovery of our local economy."

The United States Geological Survey recently reported that the Southern sea otter population, currently listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, has declined, the first decrease in over a decade. Rep. Farr's bill was designed to address this issue by providing funding to understand the causes of this mortality and promote the recovery of these animals, thus restoring the health of the whole ecosystem.

The bill would:

- Establish a Southern Sea Otter Health Assessment Plan to assess causes of population decline.
- Promote ecosystem sustainability by identifying key threats to ecosystem health and ways to mitigate those impacts.
- Award competitive research grants.

“H.R. 556 is necessary to provide a stable and reliable source of funding for critically needed research, monitoring and implementation of recovery actions,” said Rep. Madeleine Bordallo, chair of the House Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife. “It’s provisions would apply directly to Southern sea otters, but because these otters are a keystone and a sentinel species, H.R. 556 would also benefit the California coastal ecosystem as a whole.”

The Senate has not yet considered this legislation.

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